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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE
RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 220th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 26 February 1996, at 10.30 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. BOUTROS-GHALI
(Secretary-General of the United Nations)

Chairman: Mr. CISSÉ (Senegal)

CONTENTS

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT OBSERVER FOR PALESTINE

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

OTHER MATTERS

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The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

2. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN noted that although the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Cissé, had been appointed to another post, it was his understanding that the Committee wished to maintain the current composition of the Bureau pending the arrival of Mr. Cissé's successor. He took it that the Committee approved the procedure.

3. It was so decided.

4. Mr. Cissé (Senegal) took the chair.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

5. The SECRETARY-GENERAL said that the General Assembly, at its fiftieth session, had reaffirmed the mandate from which the Committee derived. In recent years, there had been historic developments in the Middle East and, in the past few months, the peace process had continued to advance. There had been some setbacks, but, by and large, the vision enshrined in the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993, had been sustained. Both parties had demonstrated their commitment to the principles and provisions of the agreements signed by them and, equally importantly, to the implementation of those agreements. Both had accepted negotiation as the means of resolving their political differences and had persevered in their efforts to that end. He was encouraged by such evidence of responsiveness and responsibility.

6. He had welcomed the signing on 28 September 1995, in Washington, D.C., of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which represented an important step towards full implementation of the Declaration of Principles. The timely withdrawal of Israeli troops and the successful holding of Palestinian elections had been further crucial milestones along that road. It was his hope that those achievements would encourage progress in the next important and delicate stage of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, which were due to start in May, as well as on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks of the Middle East peace process, enabling the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

7. Sadly, the world had lost one of the great contributors to the peace process. Yitzhak Rabin had proved himself truly to be both a national leader and an international statesman. He paid tribute to the memory of Mr. Rabin, whom he had been privileged to count as a personal friend, and reaffirmed the resolve of the United Nations to pursue with vigilance the ideal of regional peace for which Mr. Rabin had worked to the very end.

8. The security situation in the region remained a cause for concern. Over the past year, he had had, on several occasions, to condemn acts of violence which were clearly attempts at derailing the peace process. The latest such attempt had been made the previous day. How many more innocent people would have to die and suffer before peace was achieved in the region? Extremism from any quarter must be curbed. There could be no more effective way of doing so than by ensuring that the negotiations continued and that the tangible benefits deriving from the agreements were apparent and accessible to all.

9. It was essential to deal with the economic instability and to improve the poor living conditions which persisted, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The transition to Palestinian self-rule must be accompanied by economic and social development which would provide a sure foundation for a lasting peace. The programmes and agencies of the United Nations system would continue to provide all possible expertise and assistance in that respect. Mr. Peter Hansen, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, had recently been designated Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. He was confident that Mr. Hansen would continue and build upon the work of his distinguished predecessor, Mr. Ilter Türkmen.

10. He himself placed the greatest possible emphasis on sustainable economic and social development in the occupied territories. Accordingly, the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, Mr. Terje Rod Larsen, had continued to guide and support the activities of United Nations programmes and agencies; they included the facilitation of public works projects to create immediate employment opportunities in the Gaza Strip. In addition, a coordination mechanism had been established to ensure effective disbursement of donor funds. Training and other assistance was being coordinated for the Palestinian police. The committed efforts of the international community were gradually beginning to bear fruit, particularly in the areas of institution-building and infrastructure development.

11. In conclusion, he expressed his appreciation for the continuing efforts of the Committee in pursuit of a just peace in the Middle East. He was grateful to the Committee for recognizing the need for flexibility in the use of resources. Regrettably, due to the recent further exacerbation of the Organization's financial crisis he was obliged to urge the Committee once again to exercise restraint and economy in the year to come.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

12. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as representative of Senegal, said that it had been his good fortune to take up his post as his country's permanent representative to the United Nations at a turning-point in the Organization's history, as the end of the cold war was opening the way for greater realism in international relations. No one, however, could have foreseen the dramatic progress in the situation in the Middle East.

13. The Palestinian problem was the root cause of the poor relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours. The Committee's mandate to safeguard the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people had therefore placed it at the

heart of the Middle East conflict. In fulfilment of its mandate, the Committee had acted resolutely yet objectively and had condemned all violations of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Contrary to the views of certain delegations, the Committee had never shown any bias in its evaluation of the Palestinian problem.

14. The signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization on 13 September 1993 had been a historic development which had profoundly changed the situation. Accordingly, the Committee had undertaken a review of its own aims and methods. It had adapted its programme of work to the new realities and needs and, in view of the financial crisis, had scaled back its activities. In the interest of preserving the Committee's efficiency it was important that no staff cuts should be made in the Division for Palestinian Rights and that the funding for its database should be increased. At the same time, however, the Committee Bureau and the Division must continue to rationalize their activities.

15. Looking to the future, he said that, whatever the obstacles along the road, there was no doubt that the peace process had become irreversible. While the election of Yasser Arafat as president of the Palestinian Interim Self-Governing Authority and the creation of an elected assembly were particularly encouraging signs, it should not be assumed that the Committee no longer had a role to play. The Committee's mandate was to identify and condemn all violations of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Regrettably, such violations continued to occur. He was confident that the Secretary-General, who had been unstinting in his efforts in support of the peace process, would ensure that the Committee was able to continue its vital work.

16. In conclusion, he thanked everyone, particularly the Permanent Observer for Palestine, for their assistance throughout his tenure as chairman of the Committee.

STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT OBSERVER FOR PALESTINE

17. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) said that the United Nations would continue to have a responsibility towards Palestine until all the issues within the Committee's remit had been completely resolved.

18. The redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank and the Palestinian elections, which had been characterized by high voter participation, integrity and transparency, were two particularly important developments. At the same time, however, he pointed out that there was as yet no guarantee of safe passage between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, that persons who had been displaced since 1967 had yet to be allowed to return home and that the Gaza Strip and West Bank were still being isolated from the outside world.

19. Negotiations between Palestine and Israel should proceed in accordance with the agreed time-frame, and a new and faster pace should be established for the peace process involving greater cooperation by the Israelis, a fresh approach to the economic issue, more efforts on the part of donor countries, and greater participation by United Nations bodies.

20. The Palestinian position on the most recent terrorist outrage and all previous attacks was one of condemnation and total rejection of all acts of violence. He again appealed for an end to all terrorist acts, including political assassination.

21. On the matter of the financial crisis affecting the United Nations, he hoped that the Observer Mission would take the Secretary-General's appeals for greater efficiency into account, but stressed that a minimum level of functions was essential to fulfil the mandate stipulated by the General Assembly.

22. Concerning the future work of the Committee, he regretted the comments made by the representative of the United States in connection with the enhancement of the effectiveness of the work of the Organization. The latter's criticisms of the Committee betrayed a hostile position at odds with the tangible political developments which had taken place in the Middle East. He believed that all sides should be prepared to change their views to take account of such developments, and in rejecting the criticisms, he trusted that the United States Government would display a more positive attitude towards cooperating with the Committee and accepting the role which the United Nations had played in building peace in the region.

The meeting was suspended at 11.54 a.m. and resumed at 11.55 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

23. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would need to consider what activities it wished to undertake in 1996. The Bureau had prepared a draft programme of work for the year which would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

OTHER MATTERS

24. Mr. FARHADI (Afghanistan), supported by Mr. AWAAD (Observer for Egypt), Mr. ZLENKO (Ukraine), Mr. BALZAN (Malta), Mr. INSANALLY (Guyana) and Mr. SHAMI (Pakistan), paid tribute to the outgoing Chairman for his valuable work.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.